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## Leading role for NPS in Coral Reef Task Force

by *Cliff McCreedy*

Twenty-seven percent of coral reefs have been lost or seriously degraded worldwide and another 60% are threatened, according to the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network and the World Resources Institute. Charged by Executive Order 13089 to protect the nation's imperiled coral reefs, a task force of 17 federal, state, and territorial agencies are coordinating their responses to threats from impaired water quality, overfishing, coral bleaching, and disease. As part of the Department of the Interior, the National Park Service is a key player in these efforts under the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, cochaired by the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Harold Craig Manson. And with more than 275,000 acres of coral reefs, the 10 coral reef national park units not only offer outstanding recreational opportunities but also a chance to protect their biodiversity and astonishing natural beauty for future generations to enjoy.

Assistant Secretary Manson said, "We need to develop an inventory of coral reef resources, conduct an assessment of the state of reefs, and monitor their health over the long term. We need to take action now to reduce pollutants and sedimentation on reefs" and "stop the overharvesting of coral reefs and the fish and animals that depend on them."

The NPS Water Resources Division is providing national policy and planning



NPS PHOTO BY MATT PATTERSON

Mangrove prop roots, coral heads, and fish in the recently designated Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument.

support to the task force and helping parks to meet the challenge from the assistant secretary. The National Park Service is pursuing cooperative programs with states, territories, and federal partners to manage and restore reef fish populations (see page 50) and to address sources of sedimentation and pollutants in coastal park watersheds. In 2001, Dry Tortugas National Park set aside the 46-square-mile (119-square-kilometer) research natural area as a no-take reserve to protect

shallow seagrass beds, coral reefs, and mangrove communities. General management plan updates are under way to implement no-take reserves at the new Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument and at the expanded Buck Island Reef National Monument. ■

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